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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI - FRENCH PRESIDENT SARKOZY'S JAN 19 VISIT

REF: 21 JAN 2010 KANEDA-WONG EMAILS; 08 DJIBOUTI 309

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (C), (D)

[¶1.](#) (S/NF) Summary: During a brief stop-over in Djibouti January 19, French President Nicholas Sarkozy met with Djiboutian President Ismael Omar Guelleh for a wide-ranging discussion that included China's role in Africa, climate change, Eritrea's role in the region, the African Union, French plans to re-negotiate its defense agreement with Djibouti, and French interest in an improved intelligence relationship, according to the French Ambassador. Senior Djiboutian contacts told us they had asked for French help in monitoring ship traffic to/from Eritrean ports to guard against arms smuggling; Sarkozy reportedly replied he would have his staff consult the USG on this proposal. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Taking the opportunity of a refueling stop in Djibouti en route home from Reunion, Sarkozy met with Guelleh for over an hour late in the evening of January 19. French Ambassador Dominique Decherf (protect) reported Sarkozy as relaxed and unhurried during the meeting. Among the topics covered:

--China in Africa - Sarkozy warned that China's disinterest in improving governance and economic transparency would hurt African interests in the end; Guelleh noted that China is the only major donor to support critical infrastructure needs.

--Climate Change - Sarkozy defended the Copenhagen outcome and appealed for Djiboutian support; Guelleh welcomed the results of the Copenhagen meeting.

--African Union - Sarkozy urged that Djibouti help thwart Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's attempt to secure a second term as AU Chairman; Guelleh was of course receptive as Libya was the sole Security Council member to vote against UN Security Council Resolution 1907 to sanction Eritrea - Djibouti's top diplomatic priority last year.

--Eritrea - Sarkozy assured Guelleh of his concern over Eritrea's role in the region; after the meeting, Sarkozy publicly noted that France had voted for UNSCR 1907. (Decherf commented that the discussion had improved the atmosphere after Djiboutian ire over seeming lack of French enthusiasm for the resolution.)

--Defense Accords - Sarkozy reminded Guelleh that France is eager to update its 1977 defense accord with Djibouti. According to Decherf, this is a technical matter that awaits Djiboutian review of the new draft documents. Decherf believed the meeting would help to accelerate GODJ work on this priority.

--Somalia-Yemen - Though prominently featured in the communiqué issued following their meeting (Ref A), Sarkozy and Guelleh touched only briefly on Somalia and Yemen, noting their shared concern over security developments in these countries, Decherf said.

¶3. (C) Eritrean Weapons Shipments: In their read-out of the meeting, President Guelleh and Foreign Minister Mahmoud Youssouf told visiting Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow January 24 (septel) that they had asked Sarkozy to deploy French naval assets to check for illicit arms on ships moving to/from Eritrean ports. Sarkozy demurred, Guelleh said, but agreed to have Elysee staff consult with the U.S. Embassy in Paris regarding plans for such monitoring.

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¶4. (S/NF) French/Djiboutian Intelligence Cooperation: According to Decherf, Sarkozy also used the meeting to propose improved intelligence cooperation with Djibouti. Relations between their services have been strained, in large part because the head of the Djiboutian service was indicted in a French court for allegedly suborning a witness to the murder of a French magistrate (the "Borrel Case"). This case has since been dropped (Ref B).

¶5. (C) Comment: This was the first trip by a French president to Djibouti since Jacques Chirac during his first term. Sarkozy had visited previously as Minister of Interior. President Guelleh met with Sarkozy during a visit to Paris in December 2007. French Ambassador Decherf was clearly relieved that the short stop-over had gone smoothly and that the French President had been patient and charming throughout the encounter with his Djiboutian counterpart. The French appear to hope that this visit will help clear the air after the open Djiboutian annoyance with French foot-dragging on UNSC action against Eritrea.
SWAN